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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of traditional and accelerated public speaking instruction on undergraduate-level students' self-perceptions of communication apprehension and self-esteem. Subjects, students at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs were enrolled in the same semester in either a 16-week traditional public speaking course (n=64) or an accelerated one-week public speaking course (n=35). Entrance and exit assessment testing was conducted in both courses through the administration of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. T-tests comparing the degree of increase in self-esteem indicated no significant differences between students in the two course formats. T-tests comparing the degree of decrease in communication apprehension indicated no significant difference between the two course formats regarding student apprehension in groups, meetings, or conversations. However, students in the 16-week course demonstrated a significantly greater reduction in public speaking anxiety and in overall apprehension than did students in the one-week course. An obvious explanation for the differences in the latter observation is the time factor. Students in the 16-week course had more time to learn about anxiety, more time to process that information, and more time to research, prepare, and practice speaking in the communication laboratory. Conclusions of this study call attention to the value of extensive treatment to remediate public speaking anxiety and overall communication apprehension. (Contains three tables of data and 30 references.) (Author/TB)

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Student Assessment of Communication Apprehension and Self-Esteem: The Impact of Traditional and Accelerated Public Speaking Instruction

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Abstract

This paper examines the impact of traditional and accelerated public speaking instruction on undergraduate-level students' self perceptions of communication apprehension and self-esteem. Subjects were enrolled in the same semester in either a 16-week traditional public speaking course (n=64) or an accelerated one-week public speaking course (n=35). Entrance (pre-) and exit (post-) assessment testing was conducted in both courses through the administration of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (McCroskey, 1970) and a self-esteem instrument (Rosenberg, 1965). T-tests comparing the degree of increase in self-esteem indicated no significant differences between students in the two course formats. T-tests comparing the degree of decrease in communication apprehension indicated no significant difference between the two course formats regarding student apprehension in groups, meetings, or conversations. However, students in the 16-week course demonstrated a significantly greater reduction in public speaking anxiety and in overall apprehension than did students in the one-week course.

Student Assessment of Communication Apprehension and Self-Esteem: The Impact of Traditional and Accelerated Public Speaking Instruction

The examination of public speaking pedagogy and instructional methods has been a topic of interest to communication scholars for decades, if not for centuries. No doubt the early sophists attempted to determine the best methods of instruction to motivate students and positively impact public speaking outcomes. More contemporarily, but as early as 1929, empirical research investigated the psychological ramifications associated with public speaking (Knower, 1929). By 1939, Hayworth was more concerned with measuring public speaking performance; and, in 1947, Norvelle began to draw comparisons between specific types of college students in regard to public speaking. In 1956, Fotheringham developed techniques for measuring the effectiveness of public speaking classes. The 1970s brought an interest in the impact of videotape on delivery skills (Mulac, 1974), and, the 1990s, evidenced concern for the impact of interactive video on public speaking instruction (Cronin, 1992). Considering, the many notable examinations of public speaking pedagogy in the past and the abundance of tertiary public speaking courses in the present, the issue of public speaking instruction merits continued exploration. Much research interest has centered on how students' ability to speak effectively in public can be learned, demonstrated, and evaluated. In addition to evaluating and assessing improvement in abilities and observed

performance, it also is also valuable to examine improvement in self-perceived affect, that is how students feel about public speaking. Such affect may be related to the instructional method used.

The present study examined the impact of two instructional methods for teaching the public speaking course, one traditional (a 16-week course) and one accelerated (a one-week intensive course) on two measures of self-perceived affect, communication apprehension and self-esteem. The research questions under investigation were as follows:

> Do students in either a traditional or accelerated public speaking course report a significantly greater decrease in communication apprehension?
>
> Do students in either a traditional or accelerated public speaking course report a significantly greater increase in self-esteem?

Communication Apprehension and Self-Esteem

According to Watson (1986), communication apprehension affects from 15% to 20% of the college student population. Communication apprehension has emerged as a dominant paradigm for explaining communication stress (Porter, 1986). Of much interest and concern to scholars, communication apprehension and avoidance have been among the most commonly studied constructs in the communication

literature of the past two decades. Payne and Richmond (1984) compiled a bibliography citing nearly 1,000 articles, books, and papers directly related to communication apprehension and avoidance.

One such study examined the achievement levels of college students who demonstrated high and low degrees of public speaking anxiety (Boohar and Seiler, 1982). Results of the study indicated that students with high anxiety interacted less with instructors and achieved less successful outcomes than students with low anxiety. Biggers (1988) conducted a study investigating whether students who successfully completed a basic course in public speaking experienced less anxiety about speech situations. Communication apprehension, speech anxiety, and other traits were measured. The results showed that successful completion of the basic public speaking course did reduce anxiety about public speaking. Another study of the impact of instruction on communication apprehension compared two ways of providing instruction to students on delivery skills (Neer and Kircher, 1989). One group of students received specific instructions on delivery in three class sessions prior to their first speech. Another group of students received only general instructions, that is, only a brief introduction to delivery skills before the first speech. Results of the study indicated that anxiety level decreased more significantly, particularly for high apprehensive students, if they received more detailed and specific instructions prior to the first speaking assignment. In a more recent study,

Ellis (in press) evidenced a correlation between perceived teacher immediacy behaviors and the significant reduction of students' communication anxiety in the public speaking course. By contrast to previous findings, in the Ellis study, high communication apprehensive students, as well as moderate and low apprehensives, demonstrated a significant reduction in apprehension. The impact on high apprehensives, reportedly was a result of extensive individual support in a communication laboratory setting.

In comparison to studies of communication apprehension, the impact of public speaking instruction on self-esteem has not been widely studied by communication scholars. The majority of studies concerning self-esteem are reported in the psychology literature. For example, a study by Supplee (1989) described a two year pilot program for gifted underachievers in a rural elementary school district. The results indicated significant improvements in the students' self-esteem. Lewis (1992) examined how a teacher used teaching techniques (e.g., giving praise, appropriate commenting) in a writing workshop to build self-esteem among students with learning disabilities. Growth in self-esteem correlated with growth in writing skills at the conclusion of the nine months of instruction. Other studies have examined a wide range of instructional issues related to students' self-esteem, such as: the impact of a mentoring self-esteem course on adolescent girls (Hutton, 1993); designing and delivering instructional strategies for improving the self-esteem of secondary at-risk students (Moore, 1991); creating a teaching and learning environment that promotes

self-esteem in a student-center physics classroom (Wilkinson, 1988); and, the interplay of teacher and student characteristics on self-esteem and coping skills (Peck, 1981). Despite this research, public speaking instruction, as it relates to self-esteem, has not been adequately addressed.

Accelerated Learning

In regard to accelerated instruction, much of the research has focused on accelerated learning and the disadvantaged learner, or the student at-risk (see, for example, Kussrow, 1993; St. John, 1992). Some studies have considered methods for improving instructor or instructional skills that would accelerate the learning process such as association, guided imagery, relaxation, and positive mind-setting. (Reid, 1985). Also under the broad rubric of accelerated learning are studies that link the brain and how it functions to various pedagogies that maximize learning and shorten the learning curve (Cullen, 1986; McGinty, 1988).

Within the communication literature, accelerated learning has not been a topic of extensive inquiry. A notable exception is a study of an accelerated training program in public speaking and its impact on trainees' self-reported communication apprehension (Webb, 1989). That training, conducted in four three-hour sessions, was well received by trainees and did significantly reduce self-reported apprehension. However, the impact of the accelerated training was not compared to a more traditional method of instruction. Extending that investigation, the present study

examined whether students in two public speaking courses, one utilizing a one-week accelerated instructional format and the other a 16-week traditional format, demonstrated significant differences in levels of self-reported communication apprehension and self-esteem.

Method

Overview

Pre- and post-assessment programs for basic communication courses at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs are used to assess and provide individual advising to students and to evaluate the impact of course instruction on undergraduate students. In some courses, though not in the present study, a pre- and post-test control group design is used. In all of the basic courses, all students individually participate in both entrance (pre-) and exit (post-) assessment interviews in an oral communication laboratory. These half-hour to one-hour interviews occur within the first two and the last two weeks of the semester; or, in the case of a one-week course, on the first and the last day of the course. The interviews are conducted by graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) trained to administer selected assessment instruments to students. For consistency purposes, the same GTA administers the entrance and exit interview to a given student. The instruments administered for any basic course are selected by the Communication Department faculty based on their reliability, validity, cultural bias factors, and ability to evaluate that which

the faculty intend for the course to impact. In addition to engaging in pre- and post-assessment with selected instruments, students in the 16-week course establish personal goals for the course in the entrance interview and review those goals in the exit interview. In the pre-test interview, discussion with the student focuses on his or her strengths and areas to consider for development during the course. In the post-test interview, at the conclusion of the course, the student's progress is considered and plans for future development in needed areas of communication are discussed. These plans are based on the student's differences in assessment scores between the entrance and exit interview. The students' interviews in the one-week public speaking course are not as participative. Due to time limitations, the one-week students engage in assessment activities in both the pre- and post laboratory visits but not in goal setting and review.

Sample

Subjects in the present study were 35 students enrolled in a one-week, public speaking course and 64 students enrolled in a traditional 16-week public speaking course. Selected instruments that assess two aspects of the affective domain of public speaking were pre- and post-administered to all students in both course formats.

Instruments

In the entrance and exit interviews in the traditional 16-week course, students present a short impromptu speech that is evaluated using The Competent Speaker Evaluation Form (Morreale, Moore,

Taylor, Surges-Tatum, and Hulbert-Johnson, 1993). In both courses, the one-week and the 16-week, all students are administered the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA-24) (McCroskey, 1982) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965). The PRCA measures apprehension in meetings, groups, conversations, public speaking, and overall communication apprehension. The PRCA has been utilized in numerous studies and has consistently shown internal reliabilities in the .93 to .95 range (Morreale and Backlund, in press). The RSE assesses the student's perceptions of self-esteem. The RSE shows a test/retest reliability of .85 (Morreale and Backlund, in press). In the present study, both of these instruments were computer-administered and scored in the oral communication laboratory, providing rapid feedback to the student for immediate discussion with the GTA. In the entrance interview, students enrolled in the 16-week course with higher than average levels of communication apprehension are encouraged to return to the laboratory for remediative support in the form of individual assistance modules. If the students' scores reflect low self-esteem, they are referred to other student support services on campus.

Data Collection and Analyses

Demographic data and results of the assessment process were collected during the entrance and exit interviews for the 16-week course and on the first and last day of the one-week course. Those data were entered into a database connected to the University mainframe. At the conclusion of both courses, the data were

statistically analyzed using correlative t-tests first to compare students' pre-scores in both courses and then their post-scores in both courses. T-tests were used again to compare the students' degree of improvement in the one-week course to the students' degree of improvement in the 16-week course. Improvement was operationalized as a decrease in communication apprehension and an increase in self-esteem.

Results

The results of the assessment processes in both public speaking courses are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1 presents the results of comparing pre-test scores on the PRCA and the RSE of the 64 students in the traditional 16-week course to the pre-test scores on the PRCA and the RSE of the 35 students in the one-week course.

Insert Table 1 Here.

As Table 1 indicates, the only notable difference in pre-test scores between students in the two courses was in regard to public speaking apprehension ($p = .065$). Students began the 16-week course with somewhat more apprehension than students in the one-week course.

Table 2 presents the results of comparing post-test scores on the PRCA and the RSE of the 64 students in the traditional 16-week course to the post-test scores on the PRCA and the RSE of the 35 students in the one-week course.

Insert Table 2 Here.

As Table 2 indicates, there were no significant differences in post-test scores between students in the two courses regarding apprehension or self-esteem. Considering the difference in public speaking apprehension reported on the pre-tests, the assumption was that students in the 16-week course improved more significantly on this variable.

Table 3 presents the results of a comparison of the degree of improvement of students in the traditional 16-week course to the degree of improvement of students in the one-week public speaking course.

Insert Table 3 Here.

As Table 3 indicates, students in the 16-week course did demonstrate significantly greater decrease in public speaking anxiety ($p = .003$), and in overall communication apprehension ($p = .05$).

Discussion

T-tests comparing the degree of increase in self-esteem indicate no significant differences between students in the two course formats. T-tests comparing the degree of decrease in communication apprehension indicate no significant differences between the two courses regarding anxiety in groups, meetings, or conversations. However, students in the traditional 16-week course demonstrated, by comparison to students in the one-week course, a significantly greater reduction in public speaking anxiety and in overall communication apprehension.

An obvious explanation for the differences in the reduction of public speaking anxiety and overall apprehension within the course is the time factor. Students enrolled in the 16-week course had the opportunity to receive more information about apprehension and about public speaking generally; they also had more time to process that information. Also, even though students in both courses presented the same number of speeches, in the 16-week course there was markedly more time to research, prepare, and practice each speech. Preparation and practice have been linked to effective remediation of public speaking anxiety (Watson, 1986). In any case, this research seems to suggest that the more time a student spends in a public speaking course, the greater the reduction in speaking anxiety and overall apprehension may be.

Another notable explanation for the differences in the reduction of public speaking anxiety and overall apprehension is the varying amount of time that the students enrolled in the two

courses spend in the oral communication laboratory. Students in the 16-week course are required to attend both the pre- and the post-interviews that are conducted individually with a trained GTA in the laboratory. Students enrolled in the one-week accelerated course are not required to participate in such one-on-one lab visits. They are required to visit the lab merely to be administered the assessment tools. Students in both courses review all of their videotaped speeches in the laboratory. But the viewing by students in the one-week course, by comparison to those in the 16-week course, may be more hurried and may not allow opportunity for extensive discussion about the videotaped performance. A study conducted by Courtney and associates (1991) supports the positive impact of laboratory experiences on students' communication apprehension in the public speaking course. That study measured the effectiveness of a beginning speech class and optional speech lab support on communication apprehension and grade performance. Results suggested that students who used the speech lab showed more significant reduction in apprehension and improvement in grades.

Conclusion

Like past studies, the findings of the present investigation call attention to the value of extensive treatment to remediate public speaking anxiety and overall communication apprehension. Additionally, this study suggests there may be a benefit to the on-going use of laboratory-based instructional programs as support for

the basic public speaking course. This study should not be used to argue that accelerated learning and the one-week intensive format for public speaking instruction is without value. Students in the one-week course did demonstrate improvement on the affective variables assessed, but not as significant an improvement on two of the variables (public speaking anxiety and overall communication apprehension) as the students in the 16-week course.

Given the exploratory nature of this study as well as the small sample size available to the researchers, further studies into accelerated learning and traditional instruction are needed to fully assess their varying impact on public speaking students. For example, future studies might: increase the size of the sample population in order to examine varying impact on high, moderate, and low apprehensive students of the two pedagogical modes examined here; add variables other than communication apprehension and self-esteem to the research design; examine varying impact on students of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds, or use qualitatively-based methodologies. As more and more institutions offer accelerated coursework in an effort to meet the demand of an ever-expanding non-traditional student population, the issues raised in this exploratory study will merit further examination.

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Table 1:

T-Tests Comparing Pre-test Scores of Students in the Traditional 16-Week Course to the Pre-test Scores of Students in the One-Week Accelerated Course, on the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), and Self-Esteem (RSE).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
PRCA Group				-.30	.767
16-Week	64	13.48	5.29		
One-Week	35	14.06	10.67		
PRCA Meeting				.90	.372
16-Week	64	13.92	5.06		
One-Week	35	13.03	4.54		
PRCA Conversation				.97	.336
16-Week	64	13.03	4.98		
One-Week	35	12.11	4.22		
PRCA Public Speaking				1.87	.065
16-Week	64	20.39	10.62		
One-Week	35	17.51	4.65		
PRCA Overall Comm App				1.03	.307
16-Week	64	58.77	20.22		
One-Week	35	55.06	15.23		
Self-Esteem				-.47	.641
16-Week	64	33.59	4.69		
One-Week	35	34.03	4.25		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

Table 2:

T-Tests Comparing Post-Test Scores of Students in the Traditional 16-Week Course to the Post-Test Scores of Students in the One-Week Accelerated Course, on the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), and Self-Esteem[2] (RSE).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
PRCA Group				-.16	.875
16-Week	64	11.33	3.83		
One-Week	35	11.46	3.92		
PRCA Meeting				.02	.985
16-Week	64	11.33	3.32		
One-Week	35	11.31	3.68		
PRCA Conversation				-.19	.850
16-Week	64	10.64	3.27		
One-Week	35	10.77	3.30		
PRCA Public Speaking				-1.06	.294
16-Week	64	14.53	4.62		
One-Week	35	15.66	5.29		
PRCA Overall Comm App				-.53	.600
16-Week	64	47.61	12.66		
One-Week	35	49.09	13.67		
Self-Esteem				-.80	.424
16-Week	64	34.69	4.19		
One-Week	35	35.37	3.96		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.

Table 3:

T-Tests Comparing the degree of improvement of Students in the Traditional 16-Week Course to the Degree of Improvement of Students in the One-Week Accelerated Course, on the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA), and Self-Esteem (RSE).

Assessment Instrument	N	Mean	Std Dev	t Value	2-Tail Prob
PRCA Group				.26	.795
16-Week	64	-2.16	3.65		
One-Week	35	-2.60	9.65		
PRCA Meeting				-1.19	.238
16-Week	64	-2.59	3.42		
One-Week	35	-1.71	3.56		
PRCA Conversation				-1.60	.114
16-Week	64	-2.39	3.45		
One-Week	35	-1.34	2.92		
PRCA Public Speaking				-3.03	.003
16-Week	64	-5.86	9.40		
One-Week	35	-1.86	3.60		
PRCA Overall Comm App				-1.98	.051
16-Week	64	-13.0	15.24		
One-Week	35	-7.51	11.95		
Self-Esteem				-.36	.721
16-Week	64	1.09	2.93		
One-Week	35	1.34	3.48		

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$
*** $p < .001$

Note: An increase in scores on the Self-Esteem is positive and shows improvement, whereas a decrease in scores on the PRCA is positive and shows improvement.